

What is claimed is:

- 1        1. An apparatus, comprising:
  - 2                (a) a memory within which is resident a plurality of intelligent agents and distribution control information associated with each intelligent agent that defines distribution rights for such intelligent agent; and
  - 5                (b) program code configured to control distribution of an intelligent agent in response to a request to access such intelligent agent based upon the distribution control information associated with such intelligent agent.
- 1        2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the program code is further configured to set distribution control information for an intelligent agent in connection with publishing the intelligent agent.
- 1        3. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the distribution control information is disposed in a header for each intelligent agent.
- 1        4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the distribution control information defines a publishing level that prohibits distribution of an intelligent agent to another computer.
- 1        5. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the distribution control information defines a publishing level that permits distribution of an intelligent agent to another computer only in response to authorization from product support personnel.
- 1        6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the plurality of intelligent agents are each configured to perform product support operations in connection with supporting a computer-related product, and wherein the distribution control information identifies a first intelligent agent as an internal agent configured to execute on a product support computer, and a second intelligent agent as an external agent configured to execute on a customer computer configured to utilize the computer-related product.

1           7. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the distribution control information  
2 further identifies a third intelligent agent as a base agent associated with a particular  
3 release of the computer-related product.

1        8. A method of controlling distribution of an intelligent agent, the method  
2 comprising:

3              (a) maintaining in a memory distribution control information that  
4 defines distribution rights to each of a plurality of intelligent agents; and  
5              (b) controlling distribution of an intelligent agent among the plurality  
6 of intelligent agents in response to a request to access such intelligent agent  
7 based upon the distribution control information associated with such  
8 intelligent agent.

1        9. The method of claim 8, further comprising setting distribution control  
2 information for an intelligent agent in connection with publishing the intelligent agent.

1        10. The method of claim 9, wherein the distribution control information is  
2 disposed in a header for each intelligent agent.

1        11. The method of claim 8, wherein the distribution control information  
2 defines a publishing level that prohibits distribution of an intelligent agent to another  
3 computer.

1        12. The apparatus of claim 8, wherein the distribution control information  
2 defines a publishing level that permits distribution of an intelligent agent to another  
3 computer only in response to authorization from product support personnel.

1        13. The method of claim 8, wherein the plurality of intelligent agents are each  
2 configured to perform product support operations in connection with supporting a  
3 computer-related product, and wherein the distribution control information identifies a  
4 first intelligent agent as an internal agent configured to execute on a product support  
5 computer, and a second intelligent agent as an external agent configured to execute on  
6 a customer computer configured to utilize the computer-related product.

1           14. The method of claim 13, wherein the distribution control information  
2       further identifies a third intelligent agent as a base agent associated with a particular  
3       release of the computer-related product.

1       15. A program product, comprising:  
2               (a) an intelligent agent;  
3               (b) a header associated with the intelligent agent, the header including  
4               distribution control information that defines distribution rights to the  
5               intelligent agent; and  
6               (c) a signal bearing medium bearing the header and the intelligent  
7               agent.

1       16. The program product of claim 15, wherein the header is defined in a  
2       markup language.

1       17. The program product of claim 16, wherein the header is defined in XML.

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- 1        18. A program product, comprising:  
2                (a) program code configured to control distribution of an intelligent  
3                agent in response to a request to access such intelligent agent by accessing  
4                distribution control information associated with such intelligent agent, wherein  
5                such distribution control information defines distribution rights for such  
6                intelligent agent; and  
7                (b) a signal bearing medium bearing the program code.
- 1        19. The program product of claim 18, wherein the signal bearing medium  
2        includes at least one of a transmission medium and a recordable medium.
- 1        20. The program code of claim 18, wherein the program code is configured to  
2        access the distribution control information for such intelligent agent by accessing a  
3        header associated with such intelligent agent, wherein the header is defined in a  
4        markup language.

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